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XIX.—*On the Wild Tribes of Southern India.* By JOHN SHORTT, M.D.

[*Read April 14th, 1868.*]

THE present paper is a continuation of a very able one by the same author, published in the third volume of our *Transactions*. The materials seem to have been furnished to Dr. Shortt by the Medical officers of seven of the Madras districts; namely, Nellore, Tinnevely, Salem, Berhampore, Cuddalore, Chingleput, and Guntoor.

Dr. Lloyd, the Zillah Surgeon, Nellore, names the chief wild tribes of the district under the terms of Yanadies, Yerkalas, Sukalies or Lumbadies, and Dombras as among the chief. The tribe of *Yanadies* in that district were estimated in 1856 at twenty thousand. The inland men were said to be somewhat more robust than those found on the coast, and it would appear that they in no respect differ in their habits and customs from the Yanadies of Streehurricottah already described by Dr. Shortt, *vide* Proceedings of Government, No. 836, dated 17th May, 1864, Revenue Department.

The *Yerkalas* are recognised as Koravers in the south, and are sometimes termed wandering gipsies, from their roving habits. They eat game and flesh meats of all kinds, in which they are by no means nice; the jungle herbs, roots, and fruits, also, furnish them with food. The majority of them pretend to fortune telling, to which practice men and women are addicted. They also take to basket, mat, and wooden comb making—for the former two they use the midribs and leaves of the date palm—and occasionally work as coolies; sometimes wealthy men of the tribe settle down in places, engage in cultivation, and hold land in puttah like other ryots. There appear to be many subdivisions among them, which chiefly consist in the variety of their occupations: most of them confine themselves to particular ones, such as firewood sellers, salt sellers, basket makers, and coolies, etc. There is nothing very remarkable in their physical conformation; they are usually dark coloured, average a very dark brown. In physique and intelligence they are superior to the Yanadies, and inferior to the other low caste Hindoos, who are supposed to be more civilised. Their bodies are usually very filthy, and, as a rule, they wear no clothing, except a small piece of cloth. As a race, they are low in the scale of civilisa-

tion ; and, while they pretend to a show of industry during the day, there is no doubt, from the large proportion they form as inmates of jails, that their habits at night are decidedly of a predatory nature. They form bands of dacoits and thieves, and prefer living by theft than by honest industry. The crimes they are addicted to are dacoity, highway robbery, and robbery. They are said to be the most troublesome of any of the wanderers. The men are of a spare, light make, and possess a hardy constitution. They tie their hair in a knot over the forehead. Forehead low, eyes small, nose comparatively short, and their general appearance indicates more of cunning than intelligence. Their huts comprise mats set upon three sticks ; and, when on the move, these they roll up and place on the backs of their donkeys, and are thus easily transported from place to place. They rear pigs, and are extremely partial to their flesh ; they also keep poultry and dogs. Their pack animals consist chiefly of donkeys ; occasionally some of them have a few horned cattle, and perhaps a few goats also. The same wandering, erratic, and lawless habits seem to prevail among this tribe wherever met with in any part of the Presidency.—For further information, *vide* an article in the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, vol. xvii, January to June, 1851, p. 4, by Assistant-Surgeon (now Deputy Inspector-General) Edward Balfour, Madras Army.—A similar tribe under the name of Oopokoraver is described by Dr. Bilderbeck as found in South Arcot. Their language seems to be a medley of Tamil and Telugu. They have rude ideas of religion, and will worship any Hindoo Deity: their old men are the priests of their community. Most of them have some household god, which they carry about with them in their constant travels. Polygamy prevails among them, and the number of wives is according to the means of the husband: the marriage string is always tied round the neck of the wife. Marriages are only contracted between adults. The ceremony is usually conducted on a Sunday, preceded by a poojah on the Saturday. Rice mixed with turmeric is bound on the heads of the married couple, and when the marriage string is tied the ceremony is complete. Marriages within certain degrees of relationship are not allowed, and widow remarriages not permitted ; they may occasionally live in concubinage. A custom prevails among them by which the first two daughters of a family may be claimed by the maternal uncle as wives for his sons. The value of a wife is fixed at twenty pagodas. The maternal uncle's right to the first two daughters is valued at eight out of twenty pagodas, and is carried out thus:—If he urges his preferential claim, and marries his own sons to his nieces, he pays for each only twelve pagodas ; and, similarly, if he, from not having

sons, or any other cause, forego his claim, he receives eight pagodas of the twenty paid to the girl's parents by anybody else who may marry them. The value of a wife differs in different places: in some places they are very much less, and in others again only nominal. There is a kind of clanship among these people. Each gang or community comprises many distinct families, each having their own family names, and, like the Hindoos, they form undivided families. As regards their *origin*, vide Brown and Campbell's definition of the word *Yerkalavandla*, as also Wilson's definition of *Kulaver*, *Yeraver*, and *Kuraver*, etc.

*Chenchoos*.—These are principally met with in the Velagondur Hills, which form the western boundary of the district. Their chief habitation is the Nundikana Pass, on the road between Cumbum and Ghooty. Though not found in the district, they frequently visit Nellore, and are recognised as "*Bonta Chenchoovandlu*," from, it is said, a kind of patchwork tent or booth, made up of pieces of cloth stitched together. They come in only at the time of Pongul and Sivratri, and such like high festivals, when great crowds are assembled, bringing with them bamboo rice and bamboo flutes for sale; the latter they play upon and sell, returning to their homes on the termination of the festival. The Chenchoos on the Nundikana Pass are chiefly employed as watchmen and guides. They live essentially by hunting, in which they are very skilful, using darts, which they throw by hand. They also possess firearms, visiting the villages in the vicinity for procuring supplies of powder, etc., as required. Excepting on these occasions, they never quit their hills. Some of them take to breeding horned cattle, sheep, and goats in a small way; but they never engage in cultivation, even of the rudest kind. They collect wax, honey, and other jungle products, and sell them to traders. They eat bamboo rice, jungle root, and ragee when they can get it, with all kinds of animal flesh. They kill deer, wild boar, hares, etc. They build themselves small round huts, having walls of mud and stone about a yard high, and roofed with bamboos and jungle grass, in clusters of ten or fifteen, each being presided over by a headman. Their colour is black or dark brown, never lighter. They wear piece cloths, and sometimes a cloth round the waist. They ordinarily wear their hair tied in a knot, and have no head cloths, but many of them make for themselves caps of skin. Besides the *Bonta Chenchoovandlu* above-mentioned, another division is said to inhabit the interior of jungles, which they seldom or never leave, and they are represented as being in the habit of wearing aprons formed of leaves. They speak a dialect which is unintelligible

to strangers, but it is understood by those who live near the Hills inhabited by them, and who state that it is a corrupt dialect of Telugu. The Chenchoos practise polygamy. They worship a god called *Chenchoodavadoo*, and to whom they pay daily poojah.

*Wodders*, or *Woddavandlu*.—These are tank diggers, and are common throughout the country. They engage in the carrying trade, but more frequently move about from place to place in search of work. The word *Woddi*, or *Odde*, is said to be a corruption of the Sanskrit *Odrha*, the name of the country now called Orissa. The people are supposed to have originally emigrated from the Ooryah country. Besides Telugu, they are said to have a peculiar dialect among themselves. They have nothing peculiar about their rites and ceremonies. Widow re-marriage is permitted; occupation, labourers. There are some fine well-made men among the tribe.

*Khonds*.—Dr. Howard gives a brief account of the “*Khonds*” in the vicinity of Berhampore. They are described as social, easily excited, with little or no caste prejudice, and more truthful than the natives of the plains. In physique they are well developed, wiry, and active. From an average of thirty-nine Khonds in the jail, their height is given as 5 feet 5 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, and their average weight eight stone, with their muscles well developed, and their tendons standing out firm and hard. They have an upright gait, carrying their heads erect; straight black long hair, generally twisted and knotted into a comb either on the right or left side of the head; straight noses; narrow nostrils; thin lips; not high cheek bones, black eyes, and slightly projecting lower jaw, with (generally) oval faces, giving one an idea of a mixed origin from Caucasian and Mongolian; teeth white and regular. They partake of cooked food, prepared in the simplest manner. Their ordinary food consists of the farinaceous products of the hills in the vicinity. They seldom indulge in animal food, except on festive occasions, when it is accompanied with the usual toddy and palm juice, to aid them in their convivial enjoyments.

*Lubbays*.—Dr. Bilderbeck describes the *Lubbays*, who are said to be found in large numbers on the Eastern Coast, chiefly between Pulicat on the north and Negapatam on the south; their head quarters being at Magore, near Negapatam, the burial place of their patron saint Naghore Meera Saib, to whose shrine numerous pilgrimages are made by the tribe. They are believed to be the descendants of Mahomedans and Hindoos, and are supposed to have come into existence during the Mahomedan conquest, when numbers of Hindoos were forcibly converted to the Mahomedan faith.

They are followers of Mahomed, and practise circumcision. Physically, they are a good looking race—tallish, of light complexion, and well developed limbs, not unlike the Moplahs of the Western Coast in their general configuration. The Lubbay cranium is singularly and strikingly small; the eyes are slightly oblique, and not wanting in expression; cheek bones prominent; lower jaw large and heavy; beard in some instances full and long, but in most cases decidedly sparse. As a class, they are tall, well made, and robust, and are sometimes inclined to obesity. They are generally attired in loongees (cloths loosely fastened round the waist and extending below the knees); they also wear bright coloured jackets, occasionally turbans; the most frequent head gear being a skull cap, fitting closely to a shaved head. Like Mussulmans, they live freely on animals and vegetables, making use of all kinds of flesh meats, saving pork, for which they have a religious abhorrence. Their language is Tamil, though some talk a little Hindoostanee. They are exceedingly industrious and enterprising in their habits and pursuits, there being hardly a trade or calling in which they do not try to succeed. They make persevering fishermen and good boatmen. They are lapidaries, weavers, dyers, mat makers, jewellers, gardeners, bazaarmen, grocers, boat makers and owners, and merchants. As regards the leather and horn trade, they excel as merchants; in short, there are few classes of natives in Southern India who, in energy, industry, and perseverance, can compete with the Lubbays.

Dr. Wilson describes the Lubbays in his district (Tinnevely) as descendants of Arab traders, who settled on the sea coast town some three or four centuries ago, and formed connections with females of the lower caste of Tamulians. They are believed to be religious fanatics, much more so than pure-blooded Mahomedans.

Dr. Wilson also describes the *Maravers*, *Shanars*, *Vellalers*, *Naicks*, etc., whose language is Tamil, and whom he supposes to be the descendants of Turanians and Scythians.

*Maravers*.—These are believed to be the ancient inhabitants of the plains, who became subject to Hindooism by the influx of Brahmins among them from the north: who, having emigrated from their native place, settled down on the banks of the fertile rivers, carrying with them a knowledge of civilisation, and instructing the people in the knowledge of letters and divisions and subdivisions of castes, probably some six or seven centuries prior to the Christian Era. The Maravers are believed to constitute the greatest bulk of the population of the district, numbering over one hundred thousand, and to be descendants of lineal representatives of the Pandean dynasty,

which flourished from B.C. 500 to the fifteenth century. Subsequently the capital of the Pandean kingdom was established at Madura, embracing the Madura and Tinnevely districts. The Maravers are a robust hardy race, dark skinned (almost black), athletic, active, of medium height; muscular system fully developed; forehead rather low; cranium rounded, narrow in front; eyes large and full. They are believed to be by birth and profession thieves and robbers; and have been from time immemorial employed as village watchmen, for which service they are paid in kind by the villagers for the protection of their property. They are honest and honourable to their trust in their own village; but at night form large gangs, of from fifty to one hundred, at remote places, with a view of pillaging villages. If thwarted in their designs on these occasions, they become reckless, and frequently commit murder. To avoid being taken, they divest themselves of clothing and oil their skins freely. Some notorious character having been selected for a leader, their meet takes place at some distance, and quite in a different direction, from the village intended to be plundered, so as to throw off suspicion. They carry short stout sticks, having one end loaded with two, three, or more iron ferrules, in the use of which they are great experts, more especially in the manner of throwing their sticks: they often kill game at full speed in this way. They make use of all flesh meats, except beef. Their hair is worn long, and put up after the fashion of the women of the Deccan. They seldom cover their heads; the few who do so simply tie a long coloured handkerchief about the head. In their marriages, difference of age or the absence of the bridegroom is of no consequence; the ceremony is contracted by the friends and relatives of either party, without the consent of the individual himself, and a block of wood is employed as proxy for the absent groom; and who, should he be absent from the village, knows nothing of the rite until his return, when he finds a wife ready to receive him. The rules of the tribe enforce the acceptance of the wife selected for him without his knowledge and consent. But these marriages are as readily dissolved as they are contracted—all that is necessary being for the dissentient party to cut the marriage string or thalee, and all is over. The man is bound to take charge of and support his children. The people are not slow in taking advantage of this easy system of dissolving marriages. Their religion is a species of demonology and the worship of evil spirits, to whom bloody sacrifices are offered occasionally. There are devil-dances, which are introduced especially during the prevalence of cholera or small-pox, when the whole village is thrown into a state of excitement. It is

firmly believed that the spirit of a deceased British officer is worshipped in the Tinnevely district with offerings of tobacco and spirits. Their dead are either buried or burned, whichever is found the easiest to accomplish.

*Shanars.*—These are believed to be emigrants from Ceylon, from whence they migrated during the Pandean dynasty, and found their way into Madura and Tinnevely, bringing with them the palmyra palm seed; and, having obtained the sandy wastes of these district coasts, began their cultivation, and up to the present time claim seigniorage over these tracts. They are said not to be descendants of the Cingalese race, but to belong to some ancient Tamil people, who are said to have colonised the north of Ceylon at an early period of the Chala and Pandean reigns. Their language is Tamil, and they come next to the Maravers in numbers, and a very large proportion—more than one-half—are either Protestants or Roman Catholic Christians, whilst their Heathen fellows practise demonology, with its attendant bloody offerings and devil dances, when one or more become possessed of the devil, and get quite excited with their frantic gestures and violent exertions, and are consulted by the people as to their fortunes and prospects, etc. At present their chief occupation consists in attending to and collecting the juice of the palms. Each man will attend to some fifty palm trees. These he ascends and descends night and morning for about eight months in the year; and, at an average, each man may be estimated to traverse the ascent and descent of an height equivalent to five thousand feet daily. They are not so good looking a body, either in physique or features, as the Maravers: being dark skinned, with low foreheads, sunken eyes, and prominent cheek bones, and constituting a race of very timid and superstitious people.

*Paravers.*—Fishermen, said to be a subdivision of the Pariahs, live in villages along the sea-coast, and follow the occupation of fishing. They own a number of canoes, and proceed several miles out to sea before daylight—they return again about noon; use nets, hooks, and lines. They are nominally Roman Catholics in creed: their ancestors are said to have been converted by Xavier—they certainly observe the Sabbath. As a race, they are addicted to drink, and are dissolute in their habits. They are dark and almost black skinned, with no distinguishing physical appearance from that of the lower classes of Tamil people.

*Malai Araser.*—The most interesting of the tribes next in order are the *Malai Araser*, or Hill kings, of whom little seems known as yet. They are found inhabiting the range of ghats between Tinnevely and Travancore, and probably do not exceed



five hundred in number, living in small communities, five or six families consorting together. Their huts consist of a few erect sticks, closed in with the bark of trees, and thatched with grass. They live on the produce of the jungles—wild roots, yams, honey, etc.; and, within the last twenty years, they have taken to cultivate a small supply of potatoes for their own use. This stock was originally given them by a former collector; but the tubers have much degenerated, and are now very small. The only animals about them are fowls and dogs. They rarely descend to the plains, and their language is a corruption of Tamil. They are a diminutive race, pot-bellied—probably from enlarged spleens and unwholesome food, and from living within fever range. They have long black tangled hair—a few partially shave the head; cranium small and pear-shaped, rising to a point about the junction of the occipital bone and sagittal suture; forehead low and retreating; flat nose; small eyes; high cheek bones. They are a very miserable race, and very low in the scale of civilisation; averse to intercourse with strangers; and resort to bows, arrows, and lances, and catch wild animals in pits and traps of their own construction.

*Chucklers or Cobblers.*—These are considered low in the social scale, and are met with in every district. They eat all kinds of animal food, and are particularly partial to horse flesh, and will carry away and devour all diseased carcasses of horses, even glandered animals. In some places they, like the Pariahs, claim as their peculiar perquisite all cows, buffaloes, horses, and tattoos, that have died of disease in their vicinity, over which they frequently quarrel, the quarrel sometimes terminating in murder. As a class, they are a dissolute disorderly body, given to intoxication, and carry out the functions of hangman in all stations where individuals are legally executed.

*Naicks and Reddies.*—These are believed to be a subdivision of the Sudra caste—Telugu descendants of those who subverted the Chala and Pandean kingdoms about the fifteenth century of our era. Their kings ruled at Madura, but had to succumb in 1736 to the Nawab of Arcot. Their language is Telugu. There seems but little difference between Naicks and Reddies. They are tall, muscular, and well made, and are the finest class of men found in the district; they make excellent soldiers. The great trouble caused during the Polygar war in 1801 was owing to the Naicks. They occupied then mud forts in dense jungles, but now they are a quiet and well disposed people. They use all animal food, saving the cow. Their cultivation consists chiefly of dry cereals from the want of irrigation—Cumboo (*Pencillaria spicata*) and cholum (*Soghum vulgare*) are the chief. The males wear a pig-tail, or "*Kudumay*,"

and on the death of parents shave this as well as the moustaches, in token of mourning. A singular custom exists among the Reddies as regards marriage: a young woman of sixteen or twenty years of age may be married to a boy of five or six years! She, however, lives with some other adult male, perhaps a maternal uncle or cousin, but is not allowed to form a connection with the father's relatives; occasionally it may be the boy husband's father himself—that is, the woman's father-in-law! Should there be children from these liaisons, they are fathered on the boy husband. When the boy grows up, the wife is either old or past child-bearing, when he in his turn takes up with some other "boy's" wife in a manner precisely similar to his own, and procreates children for the boy husband.

Both these classes either burn or bury their dead, accompanied by the usual music and other tomfoolery. On the 3rd, 9th, and 16th day various ceremonies are carried out after the manner of Hindoos.

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